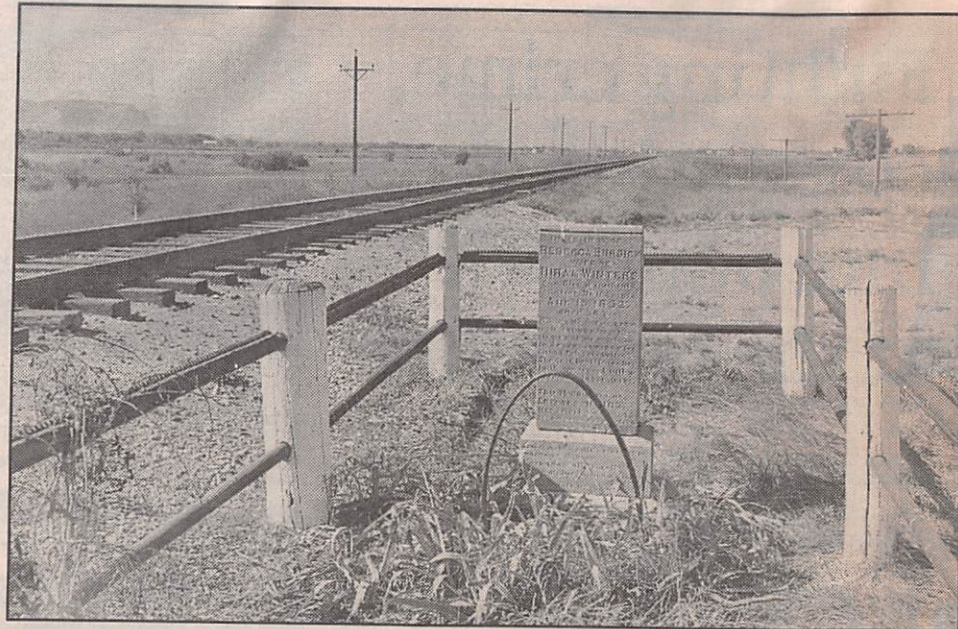


In June 1852, the Winters crossed the Missouri River. The following month cholera struck. Suffering and fatigue slowed their pace and they made camp near Scottsbluff, Neb. Rebecca took ill and reported to the hospital tent, where she died Aug. 15.

After Mormon pioneer Rebecca Winters died in 1852, a family friend placed a wagon wheel iron above her grave. About 50 years later her descendants placed a granite headstone next to the original marker. Railroad crews in Nebraska moved the grave and both monuments on Sept. 5.

Deseret News file photo



Pioneer gravesite moved after 143 years

SCOTTSBLUFF, NEB.

For decades, the lonely, solitary gravesite of a Mormon pioneer woman had been situated amid the grassy prairies of Nebraska, but because of safety concerns for visitors the grave is now being relocated.

Rebecca Winters, who died of cholera in 1852, was one of the thousands buried along the pioneer trail during their trek across the plains.

Her grave, near the intersection of U.S. 26 and S. Beltline East, was just 6 feet away from the Burlington Northern Railroad track. Over the years, railroad crews reported that spectators were wandering too close to the trains, which pass by the grave at an average of 50 miles per hour.

Right, workers begin the relocation process of the Rebecca Winters burial site. Below, more than 50 descendants of Rebecca Winters watch as crews work on relocation of gravesite.



age of 50 miles an hour more than 25 times a day. More than 50 of the pioneer's descendants gathered Sept. 5 at the site, marked by a wagon wheel iron, to watch their forebear moved from the spot in which she was buried 143 years earlier.

Not long before, they decided to relocate the grave — which is one of only a few pioneer burial plots along the Mormon trail that have been found and marked. If the grave had not been moved, Burlington Northern Railroad officials said the site would have been fenced off.

But family members wanted to preserve the site so others could safely visit the grave, like the hundreds who have already seen the solemn spot.

President Gordon B. Hinckley visited the gravesite in 1942 while working with the Church Radio, Publicity and Mission Literature Committee to compile a lecture entitled "Historic Highlights of Mormonism."

After the visit he called the grave a "sacred spot, kept green and lovely by those who appreciated its significance," and "a token of the faith of men and women who sacrificed their all to reach and build that Zion." (*Deseret News Church Section* Jan. 24, 1942.)

Some descendants of Rebecca Winters echo his remarks, thinking of the site not only as a single grave, but also as a symbol of all the pioneers who died on their journey to the Great Basin.

Rebecca Burdick Winters was born Dec. 16, 1802, in New York. After joining the Church with her father and husband in 1833, she moved to Kirtland, Ohio. There her husband, Hiram Winters, worked on the temple and Rebecca devoted her time to preparing and serving food to the temple workers.

When driven from Ohio by persecution, the Winters moved to Nauvoo, Ill., Burlington, Iowa, and then to Kanesville, Iowa, to earn enough money to take them west. He built wagons while she made many suits of clothing.

In June 1852, the Winters crossed the Missouri River. The following month cholera struck. Suffering and fatigue slowed their pace and they made camp near Scottsbluff, Neb. Rebecca took ill and reported to the hospital tent, where she died Aug. 15.

Photos by Donna Winters



That night a family friend inscribed on the outside surface of the wagon wheel iron, which was placed above her grave, "Rebecca Winters, Aged 50 years." (Daughters of the Utah Pioneers files.)

According to family histories, her husband noted that "Rebecca's name will remain there forever."

Later travelers and finally settlers in the area found and cared for the burial site. When Burlington Northern Railroad surveyors realized in 1899 that the grave was in their planned path, they adjusted the track around it.

The chief surveyor also sent notice of the grave to Salt Lake City, bringing it to the attention of Rebecca's descendants, one of which was Augusta Winters Grant,

wife of Elder Heber J. Grant, then a member of the Quorum of the Twelve.

In the early 1900s, Rebecca's descendants placed a granite headstone on the grave. Later, another monument at the site was donated by the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Family members living today say Rebecca Winters' remains will be cared for in a local funeral home until a nearby, but safer, gravesite is identified. The new gravesite, they add, will look identical to the old one, with the original wagon wheel iron and the two monuments.

The only difference, they add, is now tourists will be able to safely visit the resting place of the pioneer mother. — Sarah Jane Weaver